



The Goodness of God

Author: John Wenham
Publisher: Tyndale (1974)

This is a "good" book in its truest sense because it is a book on the "goodness" of God. That God is good is an awesome truth that deserves reaffirmation in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. I first read the book more than a quarter of a century ago when it first came out, and I feel that the arguments still hold good after some of the darkest moments of the last twenty-five years.

Essentially, Wenham's book is an attempt to take an honest look at difficult moral issues the Bible poses – the destruction of the unbelieving, the problem of evil, and the concept of hell. At the heart of these issues though lies the central problem: how could God and evil coexist?

Wenham's answer can be summarized in three stages. First, the real problem is freedom. God made man a free agent, free even to disobey Him. Herein lies at once both the explanation for the origins of evil, and the quintessential mystery of all evil. We are free to do whatever we like; this is the awesome privilege of being human, that also entitles us to be demonic, if we so choose. We Christians, if we **were** God, would like a better control mechanism in place!

Does God not like a better control mechanism in place? Apparently not! And this is the second part of Wenham's argument. In God's infinite and sovereign wisdom, suffering can be part of God's beneficent retribution. The evil do often enough get their just deserts via legal jurisprudence; faith and virtue are often tested and ennobled through the crucible of unjust suffering. And while humanists may deem it a travesty of virtue that the innocent should be allowed to be thereby afflicted, the believer is silenced by his assent to the doctrine of sin and the Fall. None is so innocent as to deserve no evil whatsoever. And if this argument seems either crude or cruel (or both!), the final part of Wenham's thesis is surely incontestable.

It is inarguable, because it uses a "heads-I-win-tails-you-lose" type of argument! And yet, hate it though we might, what else is there to do but to accept it in Christian humility, precisely because it is true? And the argument itself?... "the blessings of ignorance!" Some things we will never understand on account of the finiteness of the human mind –

why there should be congenital deformities, or what might qualify a child to be a victim of unspeakable sado-masochistic or other perversions, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam*. And the ultimate incomprehensible suffering? One truly good man unjustly rewarded with a punishment so gruesome that it was said no Roman citizen would wish upon his worst enemy – death by crucifixion. And the product of that injustice? Healing, redemption, forgiveness, transformation of society and a thousand blessings besides.

I have more than once preached on this theme of suffering based on Wenham's text since September 11, 2001. Reworking through this material and seeing it anew in the light of recent global catastrophes always do two things to me. It makes me feel like my so-called personal suffering is not quite worth talking about. And it makes me bow before the majesty of God because there is always more than meets the eye, such as an ennobled humanity that rises in response to the calamity. Read the book, and see if it does not do the same for you.

(Review by Rev Ng Seng Chuan)

Chapel Notes

Chapel last week (March 27, 2002) was taken by the dean, and the focus was on the theme of joy in the Upper Room Discourse.

The speaker began with the postulation that Jesus must have been someone who exuded joy and happiness. The basis for this lies in the assumption of there being no greater pleasure for Jesus than doing the will of his Father. When this is set against the backdrop of the impending crucifixion, this sense of joy and contentment takes an added significance. Wherewithal the joy?

The speaker then made a comparison between the mission of Jesus and our mission. He illustrated it with his own involvement in Christian ministry with former criminal offenders and drug abusers. Is it something that gives joy, set as it often has been against the backdrop of the trauma of withdrawal and the rate of relapse. And yes, surely even here, there is joy, even if it is only the joy of being able to help the few who would accept the challenge of a life long battle against the powers of darkness and of

addiction.

And so Dr Quek concluded his message with wishing that we might all find the joy of the Lord in each our area of service.

Chapel speaker for this week (3 Apr) will be our BGST alumni, Caleb and Debra Kang, who are in Singapore for their furlough. Together with Mrs Pauline Koe, they will make a Powerpoint presentation of their work in Nairobi, Kenya, and share their burden for the Gospel in Africa.

NEWS BITS

- 1. CONTACTING THE DEAN?** If you need to send an email to Dr Quek, please use: bgstdean@starhub.net.sg.
- 2. ANNOUNCEMENT.** Please note that Dr Quek's classes this Saturday, Apr 6, will not be meeting. He is outstation.
- 3. CHANGE OF VENUE.** Please note that the class for *Communication Skills for Speakers and Church Leaders* will be held at the Upper Sanctuary. Entrance is via the 2nd floor, next to the former BGST office, along the

Alumni News from South Africa

We would like to share with you this week an extract from the prayer letter of Pastor Samuel Kim (Dip CS, 2001). He is now a missionary with the Korean Seamen's Mission at Cape Town, South Africa. If you wish to receive further reports from Pastor Kim, you may make your request for a 'soft' copy through me (Pastor Quek) at bgstdean@starhub.net.sg where you can find pictorial reports of his work. We apologise we are not able to reproduce the latest photos of the Kim Family in this Bulletin:

I. Three months in Cape Town

Before we left Korea for Cape Town, we were very anxious about the situation at Cape Town. We imagined that this place must be jungle-like with lions and other animals roaring. But it was not true at all. The city, Cape Town, is a very modern city, well-built, like the modern cities of Europe. This city is well known as a tourist place and there are many Western tourists. There are also many shopping malls, all crowded with young people on the street. Of course, that is not what I want to tell you about. The real story begins now. About twenty minutes away from the town we can see lots of people who are in hunger; they live rather pathetic lives. When I saw them for the first time my eyes were filled with tears and sorrow. "Oh, God!" I prayed, "What shall I do for them?" Thankfully, several Korean missionaries have been ministering for several years at churches,

which were established for these people. Work is going well in these churches and they are growing well. Wherever we go around here, there seems always to be a struggle between white and black. When we were settling down here, we had to go around and visited many real estate houses to find a proper accommodation. Installing a phone and the electricity here is not easy. It means we have to wait many days, about two or three weeks. In this way we need to know and learn how to wait and get used to in this situation. Most of the systems in Cape Town are different from Korea and Singapore. Yes, "This is Africa". Nowadays, every thing is fine and I started working for the Seamen's Mission twice a week. The weather is quite nice when compared with Singapore's weather. It's very sunny and windy but can be quite cool in the evenings. You will surely like it. We are most thankful to God that our sons, Joseph and Daniel, have settled down nicely at the Wynberg Boys Junior School. This school was founded in 1842. We praise God for His name is indeed "Jehovah Jireh" (God provides).

II. Cape Town News

In the middle of December of last year, the First Lady, Mrs. Marieke De Klerk, the wife of the previous President of South Africa, was murdered by her security guard. But it is still not sure that who killed her no evidence has yet been found. Can you imagine that, the First Lady killed? That is the situation in South Africa. Even though, South Africa is a bigger than Zimbabwe, this country is very much affected by Zimbabwe politically and economically. Prices went up 1.5 times, compared with prices last year. The more prices increased, the more painful life became for the people, particularly the Blacks who live in rural area. When I arrived here last year, I was told that there are many Muslims here and there is a vast mission field before us. Most of the Muslims migrated here following their ancestors long time ago. Everyday, five times a day, we can hear their loud praying. This is one of our prayer requests for you.

III. Our Ministry

I am working as the Director of the Cross-Cultural Ministries (CCM), which is a division of Korea Harbour Evangelism Inc. I am also serving seafarers at "BIBLIA", that is, International Seamen Mission. Sarah my wife studies at the language school of Cornerstone Christian College. She is very hard-

Wishing you God's blessings on your Birthday!



Mr Benny Fang 01/04
Mr Rupert Tsang 02/04
Mr Larry James 04/04
Mr David Lim Hung Heng 06/04
Ms Ng Geok Har 07/04